



**servemontana symposium 2015**  
BUILDING COMMUNITIES UNDER BIG SKIES

# Breakout Sessions

## Speaker Bios

### **EVERYBODY'S GOTTA EAT! CONNECTING KIDS TO REAL FOOD IN RURAL AND URBAN MONTANA**

**Presenters: Demetrius Fassus, Andi Giddings, Amy Harvey, Emma Fernandez / FoodCorps**

**Demetrius Fassus:** recognizes our present food system as a sinking ship, and is striving to help build a beautiful lifeboat. He believes that health begins with what you put into your body, with food being the first and most important medicine. Armed with a B.S. in Biology from Butler University, Demetrius seeks to build momentum in the shift towards locally resilient food systems by educating others on the importance and impact of real good food. With FoodCorps, Demetrius is serving a second term in the fine town of Ennis, MT. Serving with Madison Farm to Fork, a local non-profit, he is building a robust and perpetual garden program within Ennis' K-12 school. With teachers already on board as garden educators, Demetrius is focussing his attention on molding the menu of the school into one that will bring out the excellence of Ennis' students.

**Andi Giddings:** Andi grew up in Maine and first fell in love with growing food after working harvest seasons at various farms. She picked strawberries as a teen, worked on a rutabaga farm, and volunteered through WOOF on a family farm in Alaska. Andi studied Anthropology at Middlebury College, where she became interested in how people relate to their environments, in particular how we relate to food. After graduating, she spent two years working at a school for experiential education with middle school students. She loved working with the kids, and wanted to integrate farming and nutrition into her teaching. She went on to spend a season working on a diverse vegetable farm to expand her knowledge about growing food. She is excited to serve a second year with FoodCorps so she can continue to combine her passions for teaching kids, farming/gardening, and issues of food access and sustainability. Andi serves in Butte, Montana, where she works with three schools, teaching food and nutrition lessons, helping to build and maintain the school gardens, organizing a farm to school Committee, and helping the food service director purchase local food through a Harvest of the Month program.

**Amy Harvey:** Amy is a Montana native who grew up on an organic dairy farm where she learned the value of a healthy lifestyle, hard work, and community connections. She earned a bachelor's degree in Environmental Planning and Policy from Western Washington University in Bellingham, WA. Prior to serving with FoodCorps, Amy was an AmeriCorps volunteer coordinator for a neighborhood farm and community garden, a research assistant at an environmental consulting firm, a Food Bank volunteer, a farmers market vendor, and a farm volunteer while studying abroad in New Zealand. It wasn't until after these recent life experiences that Amy fully realized her passion for local food and her desire to integrate it into her career path. She is an outdoor enthusiast, skier, cook, and traveler. Amy is serving in Missoula, MT where she will build upon a foundation of previous FoodCorps service by working on school food service procurement and recipe development, "Farmer in the Classroom" educational lessons, and school community garden coordination.

**Emma Fernandez:** Emma serves in Red Lodge with the Food Partnership Council in the Red Lodge Schools. Emma grew up in Washington, DC in a family who built relationships by sharing good food and stories around the dinner table. She studied public policy and ethics at Princeton University, where her interest in food grew from her passionate commitment to addressing environmental and social justice issues. Midway through school, she worked with the *Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food* initiative at the USDA, learning how local food systems provide a range of economic and environmental solutions to communities across the country. Inspired by this work, she spent senior year studying urban agriculture in Newark and wrote a thesis promoting agriculture as an urban planning tool. After graduating in 2013, she spent a semester with the National Outdoor Leadership School backpacking, climbing, and skiing her way across the Rockies, while learning group leadership and teaching skills. The following spring she worked with DC Greens to promote access to healthy, local foods in the nation's capital. Most recently, she spent the summer using experiential learning to engage teenagers on wilderness trips in the Tetons and Yellowstone.

## **BILLINGS: WHAT'S THEIR DEAL?!**

### **Presenter: Gina Simonetti / Billings Metro VISTA Project**

**Gina Simonetti** is originally from Massachusetts but moved to Montana in 2011 to serve with the Billings Metro VISTA Project after she graduated college. Having found her passion working with the VISTA Program, Gina is now the Project Supervisor for the Billings Metro VISTA Project. Gina enjoys running, reading and camping.

## **INCREASING ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN RURAL AREAS**

### **Presenters: Alison Paul, Casey Stephenson, Nolan Harris / Justice for Montanans**

**Alison Paul** is the Executive Director of the Montana Legal Services Association in Helena, Montana. Prior to coming to Montana, Alison attended law school at the University of Kansas, where she was a member of the Law Review. Upon graduating from law school, Alison went into private practice in Chicago, Illinois, primarily advising tax-exempt organizations on tax and corporate issues. Alison joined the Montana Legal Services Association in 1998 as an attorney with its Domestic Violence Unit. Alison is a member of the Montana Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission, and the current co-chair of the NLADA Technology Committee. Alison received the 2005 NLADA Innovations in Equal Justice Award for her innovative use of technology to serve MLSA's low income clients.

**Casey Stephenson** is the AmeriCorps coordinator for the Justice for Montanans AmeriCorps Program. Previously she was an AmeriCorps member and team leader with Montana State Parks where she supported education and volunteer management projects. She was also an AmeriCorps member in New Mexico with EcoServants where she performed trail maintenance, community outreach, and was a wilderness camp counselor.

**Nolan Harris** is the current AmeriCorps member serving in the State Law Library Self Help Law Center in Helena. Nolan assists unrepresented litigants with their civil legal needs by providing legal forms, statutes, and/or community resources. Before serving in AmeriCorps Nolan graduated from Montana-Western, and following his service he hopes to be employed in the public sector or attend law school.

## **COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS: SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY**

### **Presenters: Josh Vanek, Jon Stephani, Gerri Stiffarm / Montana Campus Compact**

**Josh Vanek:** The interim executive director is responsible for expanding MTCC's impact across Montana and the region, and ensuring affiliate value in MTCC's programs, initiatives and services. In addition, he works closely with MTCC's board, staff and partners to deepen the reach of MTCC's mission. Josh received his B.A. in political science from The University of Montana in Missoula before serving in the Peace Corps in Latvia from 1997-1999. After completing Peace Corps service, he returned to Montana and served with as an AmeriCorps VISTA Leader before joining the MTCC staff. He is a graduate of the University of Washington's Evan's School of Public Affairs Nonprofit and National Service Management program.

**Jon Stephani:** MTCC's program manager supports the Compact's programs and initiatives by providing site-level support to local partners, AmeriCorps VISTA members and other stakeholders. The program manager role is responsible for delivery and performance of MTCC's programs, and for seeing the MTCC mission carried out in local communities. Jon received his B.A. in English from the University of Montana Western in Dillon Montana. He is a Montana Native born and raised in Corvallis Montana. He served two terms of service as an AmeriCorps Leader with the Campus Corps program at Montana Western. Jon began his tenure as a staff member as MTCC's training specialist and began as program manager in May 2014.

**Gerri Stiffarm:** Gerri received her B.A. in Community Service and a B.A. Communication degrees from Montana State University-Northern in 2007. She worked as a AmeriCorps member for two years in the community for HRDC IV and Opportunity Link, Inc. She was born and raised in Havre, Montana and is a proud member of the WhiteClay Nation in Fort Belknap. She is the proud mother of a 16 year old daughter who means the world to her.

## **FIGHT CHILDHOOD HUNGER WEEK 2015: A STATEWIDE MOVEMENT THAT YOU CAN BE A PART OF**

**Presenters: Lily Herd, Sandor Axelrod, Abigail Lichliter, Robin Eck, Anika Ahmad-Post / No Kid Hungry AmeriCorps**

**Lily Herd** is a native of Eugene, Oregon and went on to attend University of Oregon, where she studied psychology and anthropology, and was captain of her women's Ultimate Frisbee team. She has long been passionate about promoting access to fresh, locally grown food, and is currently serving as a VISTA with Montana No Kid Hungry.

**Sandor Axelrod** grew up in Wisconsin and graduated from Macalester College, and comes from a strong family tradition of service and giving back to the community. He is currently serving with the No Kid Hungry AmeriCorps in Helena, MT, and plans to carry this tradition of activism over into a career in public policy.

**Abigail Lichliter** grew up in Dallas, Texas and graduated from Vanderbilt University with a degree in Medicine, Health and Society. She recently completed a nursing degree and a VISTA position with AmeriCorps Compact Service, and now serves with No Kid Hungry AmeriCorps in Great Falls, MT.

**Robin Eck** is a native of Seattle, Washington, and has a long history of service, volunteerism and advocacy, both here and abroad. She currently serves with No Kid Hungry AmeriCorps in Kalispell, MT and plans to go on to work in Global/Public Health and youth advocacy.

**Anika Ahmad-Post** is originally from Tucson, Arizona and has a degree in Public Health from University of Arizona. She has worked as a nutrition educator with United Way, a sexual violence prevention worker, and an English teacher for 2 years in Korea, before moving to Billings, MT to serve with No Kid Hungry AmeriCorps.

## **BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT**

**Presenters: Kim Spurzem, Ben Mincks / NCBI Missoula**

**Kim Spurzem** originally hails from Helena, MT. Her work for queer justice began in high school when co-founded Montana's first city-wide LGBTQ youth group and worked as part of a coalition in adopting Montana's first enumerated school anti-bullying policy to protect LGBTQ youth. She has been involved in the development of many programs to protect LGBTQ youth and now serves as the coordinator for the Montana Safe Schools Coalition and the Montana Gay Straight Alliance Network. Locally in Missoula she co-facilitates Missoula's city-wide LGBTQ youth group Youth Forward. Beyond working on LGBTQ justice she oversees NCBI's after school programs EPIC (Empowering People, Inspiring Change) and B-RAD (Boys Respecting All Diversity), NCBI's youth board of directors Youth Advisory Council, and all school based workshops across the state of Montana. She has trained thousands of students, parents, educators, and administrators on creating more welcoming and inclusive school communities since coming to NCBI. Beyond her work at NCBI she has a passion for research and has collaborated in writing numerous reports for the Montana Department of Corrections and Montana Legislature focusing on substance abuse in Montana. Ms Spurzem strives to create a community where all individuals feel seen, heard and valued – especially youth.

**Ben Mincks:** I was born and raised in Rapid City, SD where I snowboarded/skied, biked, hiked, drank water, etc. for 19 years. I moved to Laramie, WY in 2008 where I did most of the same while getting a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Communication at the University of Wyoming. I've worked and volunteered at different organizations ranging from the student farm to working with people with developmental disabilities. I'm passionate about volunteerism and meaningful work which has brought me to this incredible organization. I'm excited to be working alongside the amazing volunteers and staff here at NCBI to help create a more just and inclusive society!

## **BUDGETING 101: SURVIVING ON AN AMERICORPS BUDGET**

**Presenter: Summer Red / Billings Metro VISTA Project**

**Summer Red** found her passion for financial literacy while serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA at Coalition for Kids in Oregon, where she created financial literacy classes for a wide range of people, from kids, to domestic violence survivors, to individuals with housing barriers. She is currently serving as the VISTA Leader at the Billings Metro VISTA Project.

## **CULTIVATING SCHOOL COMMUNITY SERVICE PARTNERSHIPS**

### **Presenter: Heather Margolis / ServiceNation Montana, Commission on Community Service**

**Heather Margolis** has nearly two decades of experience working in the field of education and national service. Heather is the ServiceNation State Director, building a grassroots movement to make national service an American way of life. Heather is also Director of Montana Education Partnership a non-profit organization that strives to build students' confidence, sparks their intellectual curiosity, and fosters strong community connections through academic and civic engagement. Heather is also the Montana AmeriCorps Alums Co-Chair.

Heather is an undergraduate degree from the University of Colorado Boulder, her Masters Degree in Education from New York University's Steinhardt School of Education and has two boys. On the weekends, Heather can be found enjoying Montana hiking, floating or skiing with her family.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROJECT COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **Presenter: Kevin Myhre / City Manager of Lewistown, Commission on Community Service**

**Kevin Myhre** has served as the City Manager for the City of Lewistown for twelve years and has also served in the position of Chief of Police. Kevin is a Montana native and has a bachelor's degree in Sociology from Montana State University. He works closely with many civic groups in the Lewistown area to advance the communities interests in the areas of recreation, culture, history, and economic development.

## **BUILDING COMMUNITIES THROUGH BUSINESS**

### **Presenter: Robert Nystuen / Glacier Bank Market President, Commission on Community Service**

**Bob Nystuen** has been a community banker for 39 years and is currently Market President of Glacier Bank in Kalispell, MT. He is a Commissioner on the Montana Commission on Community Service. Bob is on the Board of Directors of the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce, Montana ambassadors, and the Glacier National Park Conservation. Bob is the Board Chair of the Board of Trustees of Flathead Valley Community College.

## **DISABILITY AWARENESS**

### **Presenter: Eric Kohring / Montana Independent Living Project (MILP)**

**Eric Kohring** is the Home Modification Accessibility IL Specialist for the Montana Independent Living Project (MILP), serving a 14-county region in Montana. MILP is a not-for-profit Center for Independent Living (CIL) whose mission is to help people with disabilities live more independently through providing Information & Referrals, Independent Living Skill Instruction and Training, Tools for Self Advocacy and supports Peer Mentoring where a person who has experienced a disability offers advice and support to another experiencing similar adjustment challenges. Eric received fair housing training through the National Fair Housing Alliance's fair housing school in 2011. Eric has worked as an architect for over 15 years and has specialized in accessibility for over 9 years. Eric has previously worked at the Montana State Human Rights Bureau as an investigator of discrimination, a Fair Housing Initiative Program, a Center for Independent Living in St. Louis, MO and has performed assessments and investigations of facilities and programs for accessibility compliance in each capacity over the last ten years. Eric graduated from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, IL in 1997 with a Bachelor's in Advanced Technical Studies in Architecture and is a licensed architect in the State of Missouri.

## **BETTER TOGETHER—NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAMS COLLABORATING FOR SUCCESS**

### **Presenter: Abby Zent / Prevention Resource Center VISTA Project**

**Abby Zent** is a Montana native who is a self-proclaimed "Service Junkie." Having been active in community service since high school, she served two terms as an AmeriCorps VISTA in Montana, one of those terms as a VISTA Leader, and received the Governor's Award for Civic Engagement for her service in 2007. Upon the conclusion of her VISTA service, Ms. Zent served as a program coordinator for the Rocky Mountain Development Council Senior Companion Program and has served as the VISTA Grant Coordinator for the Prevention Resource Center for almost 6 years. In her spare time, Ms. Zent enjoys crafts, knitting, reading, and volunteering.

## **TRIBAL RELATIONS IN MONTANA**

### **Presenter: Jason Smith / Governor's Director of Indian Affairs**

Jason Smith was appointed by Governor Steve Bullock to serve on his cabinet as State Director of Indian Affairs effective January 7, 2013. He brings years of experience working with tribes. Prior to his appointment, he worked at the Montana Department of Commerce as the State Tribal Economic Development Program Manager. During the 2009 Montana State Legislature, he served as Chief of Staff to the Montana American Indian Caucus. Before that he served as Executive Assistant to the Chairman of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation. Smith also worked at the Native American Development Corporation in Billings. He graduated from the Salish Kootenai College with a Bachelor of Arts in Business and Entrepreneurship in 2006. Jason is an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes and a descendant of the Assiniboiné & Sioux Tribes of Fort Peck. He is the son of Monica Caye of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes and Leonard Smith of the Fort Peck Assiniboiné & Sioux Tribes.

## **MITIGATING CLIMATE CHANGE IN MONTANA**

### **Presenter: Devin Rothman, Caroline Lauer, Bill Pederson / Energy Corps**

**Devin Rothman** graduated from Earlham College in May 2014 with a B.A. in Environmental Science. He has worked doing active conservation and stewardship both with a land conservancy in Ann Arbor and a forest preserve in New Zealand. He also has experience teaching both volunteers and as a teaching assistant while at Earlham. Devin will serve at NCAT this year, weatherizing low income homes and educating communities about energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies.

**Caroline Lauer** graduated from Harvard University in May of 2014 with a degree in History and Literature. She completed course work at the Graduate School of Design, and hopes to pursue a Masters of Urban Planning in the near future. Caroline is serving with the City of Missoula this year, updating their greenhouse gas emissions inventory.

**Bill Pedersen** graduated from Hamilton College with a B.A. in Environmental Studies. He spent last year as an Energy Corps Member serving with the Energy Coordinating Agency of Philadelphia. During his time with ECA, he helped conduct energy audits on low income homes, presented at community energy awareness events and taught at ECA's Green Jobs Training Center. Bill is serving at the Montana Department of Environmental Quality this year, launching the Governor's Smart School Initiative.

## **WATERSHEDS AND COMMUNITIES**

### **Presenter: Bryan Wilson, Katherine Boyk, David Stout / Big Sky Watershed Corps**

**Bryan Wilson:** Bryan is in his fourth year as the Program Manager for the Big Sky Watershed Corps. He dislikes speaker bios and enjoys fishing.

**David Stout:** Originally from Illinois, David's first term convinced him that the BSWC was a really valuable and effective program so he was grateful to be offered another opportunity to work in that special capacity in Montana. David will be focusing on Drought Resiliency and is extremely excited to be working on that project. David is ready to use his experience as a restoration tech and a watershed coordinator to its best use.

**Katherine Boyk:** Originally from Chicago, Katherine graduated from Northland College in northern Wisconsin. She studied Writing and Humanity & Nature Studies and she hopes to one day work as an environmental journalist or a nature writer. Before AmeriCorps she spent two summers working for two different studies of Common Loons in Wisconsin. She was also a writing intern with the Sierra Club Great Lakes Program and an editor of Northland's literature and arts magazine. Katherine is in her second term with the BSWC, and she is excited to build on the experiences she had with the Greater Gallatin Watershed Council last year.

## **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE OUTDOORS**

**Presenter: Greg Ross / Montana Conservation Corps**

Greg Ross served an AmeriCorps term as a Crew Leader with the Montana Conservation Corps from their Billings region and a few years later received a staff position with the MCC. He was the Regional Program Coordinator in the Helena/Central Divide office from 2008-2014, where he helped design and implement the regional Leadership Development Plan, facilitating technical and fundamental skills trainings for AmeriCorps members. Greg is currently the Statewide Program Coordinator from the MCC's state office in Bozeman.

## **CLASSROOM WITHOUT WALLS: MAKING SCHOOL CURRICULUM COME TO LIFE IN MONTANA STATE PARKS**

**Presenters: Jean Placko, Isabel Shinnick-Gordon, Hillary Holt, Casey Pillar, Kelly Byard / Montana State Parks AmeriCorps**

**Jean Placko:** Jean is the Montana State Parks AmeriCorps Program Coordinator. She received her Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Studies from the University of Montana. She also holds a Masters Degree in Teaching from Lewis and Clark Graduate School in Portland Oregon. She has worked as a naturalist, outdoor educator, science instructor, and classroom teacher, as well as managed and led various science education programs for non-profit organizations in the US and abroad.

**Isabel Shinnick-Gordon:** Isabel is the Montana State Parks AmeriCorps Team Leader. Isabel has a BSc. in Environmental Sciences from the University of British Columbia. She has previously worked as an interpreter for Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve, a trail crew leader for the Student Conservation Association, and a gopher wrangler for the University of British Columbia's department of Zoology.

**Hillary Holt:** Hillary is the Montana State Parks AmeriCorps Member with Lone Pine State Park. She received her Bachelor's of Biology from the University of Illinois. She also holds a Master's of Zoology from the University of Hawaii. Hillary has worked on a variety of Ecological studies and monitoring programs, mainly focusing on avian demography. She has also worked as a Teaching Assistant in Biology, a day camp Instructor, and as an Environmental Interpreter with several organizations.

**Casey Pillar:** Casey is the AmeriCorps Member at Chief Plenty Coups State Park. She has a Bachelor's degree in Liberal Studies from San Francisco State University and she also holds a multiple subject teaching credential in the state of California. She has worked in the classroom, as a cabin instructor and a lead instructor for the Orange County Outdoor Science School, and as a museum educator at Kidspace Children's Museum in Pasadena, CA.

**Kelly Byard:** Kelly is a member of Montana State Parks Americorps at Travelers' Rest State Park with a focus on Education. She received her BA in Art Education from Western Washington University. She has completed a previous Americorps term at Missouri Headwaters State Park. She has also worked as a teacher in a variety of settings, completed an internship with Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association as an educator, and lead outdoor summer camp programs along the Hood Canal.

## **THE GREAT OUTDOORS...WHAT IS IT? (Beyond the 1988 classic movie)**

**Presenter: Sarah Sadowski / Governor's Office of Community Service**

Sarah R. Sadowski brings an authentic service background that includes two years with AmeriCorps\*VISTA, a season staffing the Alaska Service Corps and almost 6 years as an AmeriCorps\*State Program Director. Sarah lives in Helena and volunteers often, for the City of Helena, Humanities Montana and other local efforts. When not Getting Things Done as the Montana Governor's Office of Community Service's Grants Manager, Sarah likes to be outdoors exploring new places and visiting favorite spaces with friends and dogs. On other occasions, Sarah enjoys spending time in the backcountry seeking solitude and reflection.